



Questions & Answers

Public Health Advisory: Coliform

Why must I boil my water?

Recent testing shows that your water system is contaminated with organisms that could cause illness.

Who can be affected? Can I become ill?

Anyone who drinks contaminated water may become ill. Infants, young children, the elderly, and people with severely compromised immune systems are more at risk of illness.

Who are people with compromised immune systems?

People who are on chemotherapy, organ or bone marrow recipients, those with HIV or AIDS, malnourished children, infants, and some of the elderly have compromised or weakened immune systems. An infection from a disease-causing organism may lead to very serious health problems for these people.

Can these diseases be spread in ways other than drinking the water?

Yes. Many of these disease-causing organisms are shed in the feces of infected people. In fact, some infected people do not have any symptoms but still shed these organisms. Childcare workers, young children who attend childcare, and caregivers for people who are sick and shedding these organisms are at the greatest risk of becoming ill. Washing hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before preparing food prevents the spread of diseases to others.

What are the symptoms to watch for?

What should I do if I think I have a waterborne illness?

Disease-causing organisms in water can cause diarrhea, stomach cramps, bloating, gas, fatigue, weight loss, nausea, vomiting, and/or fever. Symptoms may appear as early as a few hours to several days after infection and may last more than two weeks. If you are ill with these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

How can I make the water safe?

Boiling is the best way to ensure water is free of illness-causing organisms. Bring the water to a rolling boil for 3-5 minutes. When it cools, refrigerate the water in clean covered containers. If you don't want to boil your water, you can disinfect the water using household bleach. Do not use bleach that contains perfume, dyes, or other additives. Use 1/8-teaspoon bleach per gallon of water, mix thoroughly, and then let stand for 60 minutes before using.



HELPING TO ENSURE SAFE AND RELIABLE DRINKING WATER

Can I use bottled water?

You can use purchased bottled water. If you choose to use bottled water, the Department of Health recommends that you use water that has been:

- Reverse-osmosis treated, or
- Distilled, or
- Filtered through an “absolute” one micron or smaller filter

Carbonated water in cans or bottles is usually filtered or heated to remove illness-causing organisms.

During a health advisory, can I use tap water for...?

Drinking	No
Ice cubes	No
Brushing teeth	No
Baby’s formula	No
Washing vegetables/fruits	No
Preparing food	No
Coffee or tea	No
Showers/Baths	Yes
Washing clothes	Yes
Baby’s bath	See below
Washing dishes	See below

Can I bathe my baby or child using tap water?

Yes, as long as they do not drink any of the water. Don’t let babies suck on a washcloth, as they will be ingesting some of the water.

Can I wash dishes?

You can use your dishwasher if you use the sanitizing/heat cycle and a commercial dishwashing detergent. You can hand wash your dishes, then rinse them in a diluted bleach solution—one teaspoon household bleach to one gallon of water—and then let dishes air dry.

What must be done to fix the problem?

Fixing the problem could be different in each situation depending on whether the problem is at the water source or in the water lines. Usually, in every case the water lines will need to be flushed and the whole system will need to be disinfected using chlorine. The water will then be tested to make sure it is free of coliform bacteria.

How long will this health advisory be in effect?

This health advisory will remain in effect until the water is tested and results show that it meets public health drinking water standards. Your water system will notify you when that occurs.

For more information:

Personal medical questions: Contact your health care provider (physician, nurse consultant, etc.)

Call your local health department or district with general questions about infectious disease, communicable disease transmission, symptoms, causes and prevention of waterborne disease